

Israel Calls on Secretary Gates to Consider Increasing U.S. Troop Presence in Afghanistan by 12,000 Troops

Washington, DC—Upon his return from two combat firing bases in Afghanistan, Congressman Steve Israel (D-NY) blasted the Administration for rejecting a proposal by the Marine Corps to shift Marines from Iraq into Afghanistan. Israel has called on the Defense Secretary to immediately look into increasing U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan by 12,000 troops to oppose the resurgent Taliban.

“It’s outrageous that an Administration that has taken its eye off the ball when fighting terrorism would reject a proposal to get the War on Terror back on track,” said Congressman Israel, a Member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations and founder of the Democratic Study Group on National Security. “Our presence in Iraq has been a catastrophic distraction to our efforts in suppressing terrorism in Afghanistan, where the 9/11 attack, which killed over 100 of my constituents, was masterminded. We all know that it’s time we get back to the frontlines of the War on Terror; it’s just regrettable that the Administration is turning a deaf ear to proposals that would do this.”

Last week, General James Conway, the Marine Corps Commandant, presented Secretary Gates with a formal proposal to redeploy Marines from Anbar Province in Iraq to Afghanistan, where it is believed they could effectively curb the proliferation of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Yesterday, Secretary Gates rejected that proposal, saying he’d rather utilize Marine forces in Iraq.

Over Thanksgiving, Congressman Israel visited combat fire-bases in Iraq to assess the resurgence of the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Earlier this week, Israel wrote to Secretary Gates asking him to consider redeploying the maximum number possible of U.S. forces from Iraq into Afghanistan, where the War on Terror began. A copy of the letter follows:

Dear Mr. Secretary,

Over Thanksgiving, I visited combat fire-bases in Afghanistan and talked with our troops. It is clear from what I observed there and from government reports and independent assessments that the Taliban and Al Qaeda have not only regrouped in many areas, but they have gained strength and influence at our expense. This is a grave development, considering that the terrorists who masterminded the September 11 attacks that killed thousands of American civilians, including dozens of my own constituents, were trained in Afghanistan.

I am writing out of concern that we are losing ground to terrorist groups in Afghanistan, and I believe it is time to consider moving some American military personnel from Iraq to Afghanistan.

The service members with whom I spoke are doing heroic but unheralded work. Simply put,

they need more infantry to support both kinetic and non-kinetic operations. It seems clear to many that we have been unable to dedicate appropriate resources to Afghanistan because of the War in Iraq. As a result, we have not achieved a sustainable security in important parts of Afghanistan. Although it is true that the Afghan National Army and local police must ultimately develop a capacity to protect their local populations, that training will never even take place if our coalition bases have severe shortages of reliable local security themselves.

That's why I am asking you to look into immediately redeploying the maximum number possible of U.S. forces from Iraq into Afghanistan, where the War on Terror began. Even sending an additional 12,000 U.S. troops from Iraq to Afghanistan would make a dramatic difference on the ground in Afghanistan.

As you know, it's important to remember that we don't have the resources to secure Afghanistan by ourselves—many of our troops in Iraq are serving their third or even fourth tours of duty and need to return home. That is why we must make renewed efforts to reach out to the 26 NATO countries and others that have contributed troops to increase their presence in Afghanistan as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your service to our country and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Steve Israel